Design Sense

A newsletter on Packaging, Product Styling, Store Planning and Merchandising trends
Lippincott & Margulies, Inc., Industrial Designers, 430 Park Avenue, New York
August, 1956, Vol. 1, No. 4

SUPER MARKET ISSUE

Are You Selling Impulses or People?

We all too often, in discussing super market shopping, speak of the importance of the "impulse" purchase. Study after study has been produced to measure the amount of time the shopper spends in making a choice, the eye movements during the shopping procedure, the exact expenditures per minute in the super market. The result has been a portrait of a mechanical process, in which the shopper is driven by a series of inexplicable urges to choose this product or that with the precision of a Trilby under the control of a mass marketing Svengali. One quite amazing report apparently pictures the super market shopper as "actually in a state of trance. She is hypnotized. . ."

Although this is presented as psychology, we are convinced that it is merely psychologizing. It is a dangerously incorrect estimate of the shopper. The shopping procedure is a combination of things, some rational, some non-rational and emotional. The process certainly begins with the very reasonable necessity for eating. It is important to realize that the non-rational aspects of super market shopping arise from the problem of multiple choice, and not from shopping itself.

Even here, we are inclined to doubt that the impulse is as simple as it seems.

What we call an impulse might be more correctly called a convergence of forces. In making a previously unconsidered choice, the shopper is in fact responding to a whole series of experiences--of conditioning--which culminate in this particular act at the point of sale. Although the choice may be non-rational, it is not necessarily unreasonable or mechanical. It is a response to a given complex of circumstances.

In designing super markets and packages for the super market shelf, we must concern ourselves not with tricks designed to hypnotize, but with triggers to action. To fall into the trap of looking upon Mrs. Consumer as a mechanism rather than a person can only result in the orientation that we can sell her what, and when, and where we want to, rather than the more correct evaluation that we can sell her only according to what she has come to need and what we can convince her she needs.

J. Gordon Lippincott and Walter P. Margulies

These impulses are 5 and 9 respectively.

They've Putting Glamour in the Groceries

The heady revolution taking place among food retailers gets official public recognition this week in The Saturday Evening Post. (On the stands August 11th.) The Post carries the most searching, comprehensive look at the new super markets -- what's behind them, where they're going -- we've seen to date. Harold Mehling's story, "They're Putting Glamour in the Groceries," interviews top food chain developers, probes the meaning of changing shopping habits, gives facts on how giant operations are conducted. Biggest drive among food store operators, the article says, is to make shopping pleasurable with warm, colorful, dramatic interiors. How is this accomplished? Some of the answers the Post gives were found at L&M. Walter P. Margulies and J. Gordon Lippincott told reporter Mehling how they first challenged the old ideas in super market design; what they're aiming at in new stores for Elm Farms, Wm. Penn, Hinky Dinky, and others.

Sculpturesque parking lot signs,
brilliant colors, lots of room.
Even parking is enjoyable.

STEINBERG'S, CANADA

Where the Shopping Is Easy

Luxurious, beautiful, gay -- new words for describing a food store, have been pinned on L&M's design for the latest in the Steinberg chain; Steinberg's, Montreal.

No suspicions of the butcher—
you can see the meat preparation
room behind the moving
conveyor belt. The atmosphere?
Well-ordered good taste.

Produce—presented with a flair.
Glass, mirrors and murals
against a white brick wall.

Accommodations (check cashing,
bottle refunds, cigarettes)
performed in a slick setting.

New Functions for the Super Market Package

Let no one believe that supper market selling is easy. Out of 100 surveyed chain markets opened in 1950, 24 required major remodelling jobs, and six were abandoned in their first five years of life. Those which continue to operate, without need for change, will not pay off their initial investment for some 15 years after the doors are open. The success of a super market depends upon a number of factors, and vast numbers of people. Given a market, the right site, the health of the market depends upon the ability of producers to provide the right goods, and the perspicacity of the operator in choosing the products he will sell.

Variety is certainly the spice of super market life. It seems a safe assumption that were only one product in each field permitted on a super market shelf, neither the establishment nor the manufacturer would have much to crow about. For the consumer uses the super market as a giant food show, at which she is able to see a vast variety of wares, and make her choice, according to her needs, from among brands, styles, flavors and types. A typical super market with a volume of two million dollars a year carries on its shelves and in its bins 221,700 packages in the grocery department alone, divided among 1,259 different brands.

This would seem to present to the newcomer in the field a vast potential for making his entry to the super market bonanza. Yet the first fact faced by the company wishing to sell a new product is that super market distribution is at a premium, and a product must be proved profitable before what seems to be platinum-lined space is accorded to it.

Packaging is a major concern of the super market operator, just as it is to the super market supplier and the manufacturer. Even a poor package will increase sales of a previously unpackaged item anywhere from 18 to 300 per cent. A good package can be even more dramatically successful.

What makes one package design better than another in the proverbial

"battle of the shelves?" In addition to the conventional and often stated requirements of good design, increasingly passionate competition has come to demand new functions for the package. The deceptively simple best sellers usually have three major attributes:

1) A Good Brandmark* -- critical to the flagging function, catching the customer's attention as she passes along the aisles, helping the package to stand out at a distance or in its visual surroundings.

2) Advertising that motivates and penetrates -- critical to the pick-up function. A shopper may be flagged by a compelling package, but if advertising before the point of sale situation has not reached her, she may not pick up the product. If she has been previously stirred by advertising, she is triggered into examining the product.

3) In Hand Value -- critical to the comparison function. This is the attribute of successful packaging that has been most neglected, it seems to us. Today's shopper becomes increasingly confused by the ever-widening multiplicity of choice available in the super market. She is also, ever more frequently, seduced by increasingly attractive demands on a pocketbook which is not increasing fast enough to meet her expanding desires so that the movement in which she weighs the merits of two competing brands, holding them in her hands, becomes ever more decisive.

Here is an area of merchandising that has not been given the attention it demands. Consider the problem of packaging semantics alone. In general, better packaging results in less copy on the package. As designers prevail on manufacturers to reduce packaging copy, the copy that does remain becomes that much more important.

An ad in a major magazine may be read by 12 million people. Copy on a package will not be changed for a long time, may be read by a hundred million time after time. It will be carried home, read during use, may even determine the next sale. It is our feeling that package copy should be thoroughly and professionally tested. The most skillful copywriters and creative people should develop it. Packaging designers should be consulted for what they know about readability, the visual pace of words and the attention values of some words over others.

*Past issues of "Design Sense" have dealt with the subject of the brandmark at some length, and our Design Study for Management, "Designing a Brandmark", is available on request.

A Design Emerges

Behind the package on the super market shelf lies intensive design exploration. Sometimes hundreds of comprehensives are prepared, ranging from blue-sky ideas to minute variations of what finally becomes the central theme. Here our goal was to express the natural wholesomeness of the product. Many "outdoor" symbols were drawn upon; these are a few ideas considered.

Psychological exploration—the egg as a symbol of nature.

Rejected as slow in communication value.

Leaf motif—to express outdoor goodness.

A possibility from the first.

Childhood—nourishment and growth. Not unique enough.

Note experimentation with name change.

Farm symbol, the rooster—dawn sweetness.

Too ambiguous in meaning.

new

enriched

nucoa

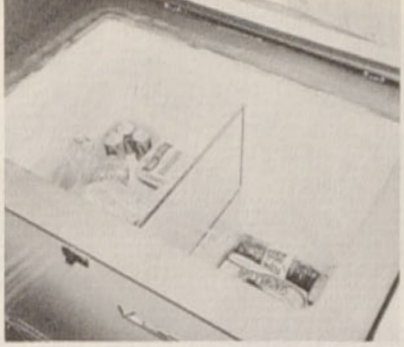
Former package.

The project nears completion.

Ad agency adapts new design motifs to varied layouts. Early story board for TV commercial shows use of leaf symbol.

The product today. In fresh blue and green colors for coolness, goodness. Leaf and petal link the product to nature; pats suggest table use (combatting margarine-for-cooking-only preconception).

The Empty Freezer



The joy of shopping.

Recently we began inquiring among our acquaintances who owned freezers to discover how they used the big cold space. We found that they used it hardly at all. Going further afield we conducted a study of home freezer usage, particularly as it is related to super market shopping. Our results seemed to suggest an interesting typology among freezer owners.

It seems that those housewives who "hated" shopping tended to put their freezers to good use. Stored in the cold chest were quantities of meat, purchased in bulk, cases of frozen fruits and vegetables, stored leftovers, etc. Still another group who used the freezer effectively were those who were excessively food-oriented -- food faddists, et al.

But the vast middle majority of freezer owners found this appliance to be something of an embarrassment. One young housewife who bought a freezer when she went to work and sought ways of saving shopping time, shamefacedly showed us the freezer with a few fish her husband had caught over the weekend as the only inhabitants.

Many rationalizations are produced for the benefit of the interviewer discussing this problem with the housewife.

"It doesn't save you time ; you still have to go out just the same for other things."

"Sometimes I have an urge to cook something, and certain cuts I need and certain ideas I want to try out won't work with the things in the freezer."

Digging more deeply into the responses, we find the freezer actually serves as a barrier to the housewife's doing an enjoyable job -- shopping. Visiting the super market is her daily opportunity to be part of the world, to realize the plenitude of living, to meet her friends and get away from home.

Provided with this clue, we feel the directions are clear: more stores where shopping is fun, stocked with delightfully packaged products.

L&M *Lippincott & Margulies, Inc., Industrial Designers, 430 Park Avenue, New York*

Printed in U.S.A.